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Comment

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Comment by the Editor

THE IMPORTANCE OF SPORT

Recreation is as old as the race. Since the first sustained effort, relaxation has been essential in the life of man. Work requires thought, concentration, and reason — the highest mental processes — while modern social relations demand more self-restraint and repression of natural impulses than ever before in the evolution of civilization. The most effective relief from the strain of these strenuous times is found in various kinds of sport.

It was ever so. Juvenal's satirical phrase "bread and games" is not paradoxical. Games in a broad sense have always held a prominent place in human activities. Play is as natural as work.

Organized sport seems to be concomitant with periods of great mental achievement. The Olympic games reached their climax in the golden age of Greece; the Colosseum and the Circus Maximus were imposing monuments to the athletes of Rome in the height of her glory; while the development of sport in America has been contemporaneous with the most complex years in the history of this nation. Nervous stress may be measured, apparently, in terms of recreation.

The rise of sport in the United States is a phe-

nomenon of the last half century. Frederic L. Paxson thinks that the passing of the frontier was responsible for it. "The free lands were used up. The cow country rose and fell. The social safety valve was screwed down." There was no explosion because a new safety valve in the form of sport was discovered. Games were substituted for the conquest of a continent to fulfill the demands of innate physical vigor.

Whatever the causes of the renaissance of sport in America, the fact is evident. Wholesale interest and participation in organized sport began between the years 1876 and 1893. That was the period of sore muscles in American history. The widespread enthusiasm for games from the time of the centennial in Philadelphia to the world's fair in Chicago has steadily expanded, with the result that the organization and control of nearly every form of sport has become quasi-national. The sporting page in the daily press — a form of recognition accorded to few other activities — is a gauge of public interest and perhaps a test of the importance of games.

Some of the recent changes in national character and opinion may be attributed, in part at least, to the prevalence and the spirit of sport. Sheer force of public disapproval has driven frauds and quacks from the advertising pages of reputable journals; moral indifference to shady political and commercial methods has given way to real concern for public honesty; and general contempt has forced

recalcitrant crooks to comply with the rules. The emphasis upon clean sport has led to cleaner living. And who shall say that the women who took up tennis and bicycling did not at the same time make a great stride toward real emancipation?

J. E. B.